Victory for Crabs and Lobsters as Sentience Bill Recognising They Feel Pain Becomes UK Law!

Monday 11 April, 2022

A monumental step for animal welfare was taken on Thursday 7 April 2022 in the UK House of Lords as the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill passed through its final stages to become law. The passing of this Bill is a historic moment for animal welfare as it marks the first-time animals like crabs, lobsters, prawns and nephrops (decapod crustaceans) are protected in law.

Crustacean Compassion Executive Director Claire Howard said:

“The Sentience Bill passing into law is wonderful news for decapod crustaceans like crabs and lobsters. The scientific and legal recognition that they are sentient and can feel pain means it is without question that decapods should now also be protected in the real world. Everyday crabs, lobsters and other decapods are treated in ways that would simply be unthinkable for other animals including being boiled alive. Crustacean Compassion look forward to continuing to work with governments and industry to translate the important words within this bill into actions that protect these animals from suffering.”

The Sentience Bill was drafted in 2021 to replace some EU animal welfare legislation post-Brexit. The Bill plays a crucial role in recognising that animals are capable of feeling pain and need protection in law.

Although at first the Bill only covered vertebrates, in November it was amended to include decapods. This was following a government commissioned review of over 300 scientific studies assessing the sentience of these animals. Carried out by an expert team at the London School of Economics (LSE) and led by Dr Jonathan Birch, the peer-reviewed, independent report concluded that there is strong scientific evidence of sentience in decapod crustaceans and cephalopod molluscs, and that they should be included in animal protection legislation.

As a nation that prides itself on being a leader in animal welfare, this was welcomed by the public, politicians, and those working in this industry who seek clearer guidance on how to handle these animals and protect their welfare. The UK’s leading organisation campaigning for the better treatment of decapods, Crustacean Compassion, highlighted the widespread support in the form of a petition signed by almost 60,000 people, and an open letter signed by scientists, veterinary organisations and public figures, including the British Veterinary Association, RSCPA and wildlife broadcaster Michaela Strachan.

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